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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH FORMER PM CHAUDHRY

11. (SBU) Summary: On May 7, I met with former prime minister and leader of the Fiji Labor Party (FLP) Mahendra Chaudhry. We discussed the situation in Fiji following the abrogation of its constitution and possible ways forward for the country. He said that the abrogation was a lost opportunity and ended any viable resolution that included the political parties. Chaudhry supports amnesty for de facto Prime Minister Bainimarama if he withdraws from the political scene and allows for a coalition government to lead the country to elections. He responded favorably to my suggestion to meet with deposed PM Laisenia Qarase but said it should be a one-on-one meeting so they could resolve their longstanding differences. End summary.

#### ABROGATION, A LOST OPPORTUNITY

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12. (SBU) In a private meeting on May 7, I met with former prime minister and FLP leader Mahendra Chaudhry to discuss the situation in Fiji following the abrogation of its constitution as well as possible future steps to return the country to democratic governance. Chaudhry said he was disappointed with de facto PM Frank Bainimarama's actions and saw the abrogation as a lost opportunity. He was concerned that there is little chance the President's Political Dialogue Forum (PPDF) can now go forward, which effectively ends what had been a viable process that included all political parties. He stressed that President Iloilo's act of abrogation, instigated by Bainimarama, not only abrogated the Constitution, but abrogated the Peoples Charter as well and reaffirmed the coup culture in Fiji. Despite Bainimarama's declared intention to lead the country to elections in 2014, Chaudhry opined that the de facto government would be unable to promulgate a new order, call for elections or hold elections with any legitimacy without the inclusion of all political parties. He said that he is planning to send a letter to Bainimarama telling him that he has lost credibility with the Fijian people and has only a small window of opportunity left to find a way forward. When I mentioned that I would be meeting with Bainimarama over the weekend, Chaudhry asked me to urge him to move things forward in a constructive manner.

#### THE WAY FORWARD

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13. (SBU) Chaudhry said the way forward for Bainimarama is to immediately lift all restrictions on the press and the right to assemble. He must allow a dialogue to begin among the political parties where they can come to agreement on the most appropriate way

forward for the country. The de facto government should have a representative at these talks, but he insisted that it should not be the de facto PM. Bainimarama should not try to manage the dialogue process and should concentrate on running the government. Chaudhry added that to do this more effectively, Bainimarama must shed some of his portfolios. (Note: De facto PM Bainimarama concurrently holds the positions of Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, National Planning, Public Service, People's Charter for Change and Progress, Information, Sugar, Foreign Affairs, International Co-operation and Civil Aviation, Indigenous and Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Provincial Development. He is also Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces [RFMF]. End note.) Most importantly, said Chaudhry, Bainimarama should not interfere with the political process.

14. (SBU) Once the political parties come to agreement on a broad framework, Chaudhry said, the UN and Commonwealth could then be brought back into the process to help with the preparations for elections and to draft appropriate changes to the Constitution. He suggested, as have other opposition leaders, that the new constitution could include a provision offering amnesty to Bainimarama and the RFMF on condition that they return permanently to the barracks. Once the new constitution has been agreed upon, Bainimarama and the de facto government should cede the power to a coalition government that would prepare for elections by 2011.

#### WILLING TO WORK WITH QARASE

15. (SBU) Noting that his vision was similar to deposed PM Laisenia Qarase's, I suggested that the two meet and discuss Fiji's future. He said he was willing to meet with Qarase but wanted it one-on-one

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so they could resolve their longstanding differences before beginning the political process of moving Fiji toward democratic governance. This initial meeting would be more symbolic rather than substantive but would be an improvement over their previous relationship as Chaudhry refused to meet with Qarase while serving in the former Prime Minister's cabinet.

#### COMMENT

16. (SBU) Chaudhry is clearly in favor of continuing some form of the political leaders dialogue that was taking place before the abrogation but this time without Bainimarama's pre-determined outcome. It seems uncharacteristically naive of Chaudhry to imagine still a political process in which Bainimarama allows genuine dialogue. With so many similarities now between the visions outlined by Chaudhry and Qarase, I see there might be a real opportunity for the two to help resolve the current political impasse. At the same time, Bainimarama would likely react negatively to cooperation between Chaudhry and Qarase.

MCGANN